

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

The Texas of Canada: Traveling with Beau

Author's Note: This is the sixth in a series of stories¹ reflecting on a 2007 trip to Alaska with my dog, Beau. During that trip I began a personal journey to an expanded understanding of One Health, the implications of which would unfold over several years.

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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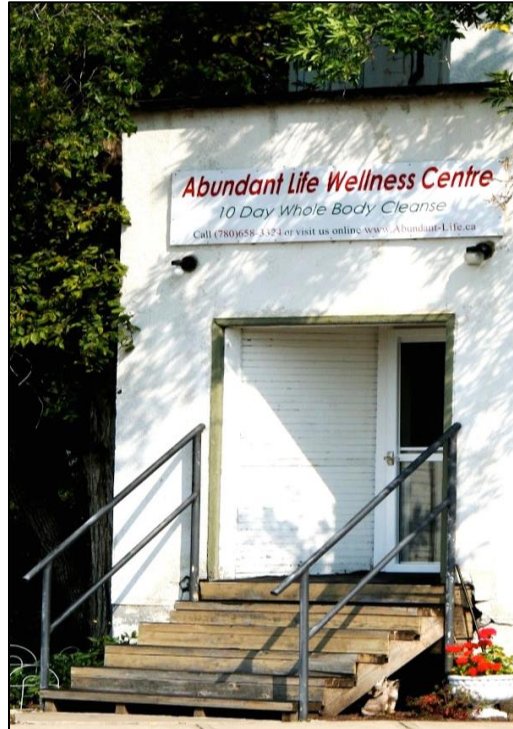
Day Six (Alberta)

The border city of Lloydminster that straddles the Saskatchewan-Alberta border was founded a century ago, on the basis of sobriety and strict Anglican values. But in typical Alberta fashion, those founding values don't prevent oil-slathered bikini-clad women cavorting in the fine art of oil wrestling from being advertised on the town's makeshift bulletin boards. I was entering the Texas of Canada: obscenely rich, seduced by fossil fuels, big trucks and fast cars. Young men with no patience to wait in line for morning coffee drove by at such a speed that the dogs unconstrained in the back of their pickup trucks braced themselves against the wind, snarling at Beau as he peered from his perch in our little jeep.

We entered Alberta at 10:30 on the sixth day of our journey. We would soon be in the bustling northern city of Edmonton, but first we stopped at the tiny hamlet of Lavoy to see how locals less captivated by the oil boom spent their days.

At the antique and general store we scanned boxes of Velveeta cheese and cans of lard, honey and udder balm. Fifty yards down the gravel road at the center of the village, a cluster of outdoor mailboxes stood beside a twisted shed. A few houses beyond, the *Abundant Life Wellness Center* advertised chiropractic, acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

Resuming our journey, we barreled our way at breakneck speed through Edmonton, the largest city in northern Canada. It was midday, and the multi-lane thoroughfare over the top of the city was deluged with trucks large and small. Like a Thoroughbred's jockey caught in the middle of the pack in the home stretch of the Kentucky Derby, I jostled around horses trying to neither use the whip nor get clipped by adjacent hoofs. Trapped next to the rail, edging to the outside of the pack became impossible. An airfield swept past on my left and I glimpsed a string of parked *Air Canada* planes.



*The Abundant Life Wellness Center in Lavoy, Alberta
(Photo by the author, 2007)*

The traffic onslaught ended abruptly and we swung in a tight arc north to the small town of Onoway where we found a comfortable park for lunch. Late that afternoon, we reached bustling Valleyview in western Alberta. We were only 250 km from Dawson Creek, the eastern terminus of the Alaska Highway. Smelling victory, Beau and I stopped at a small tourist center on the outskirts of town. It was August 17th, the 89th anniversary of my father's birth. Sadly, he had passed 40 days earlier.

As if to raise a memorial tribute to the man who taught me to live a green lifestyle before it was the fashion, the entire field behind the welcome center was punctuated in bright yellow birdsfoot trefoil, my father's favorite legume. The lush yellow carpet was an uncanny testament to my dad and he, of all people, would have loved to have been making this journey with us.

We engaged with other visitors: an older couple with a Shih-Tzu and young couple with toddlers, a pre-teen and her father with a baby in his arms. Then after securing information on local facilities, we headed into town for dinner and a place for the night.

As dusk descended and with my belly full of Arctic char and Beau's of chicken, we drove along the main street looking for a pet-friendly hotel. 'No pets allowed' was the familiar refrain, emphatically punctuated by a slovenly-dressed, fowl-mouthed New Jersey transplant at a motel that had initially seemed like a good prospect.



Beau in a field of birdsfoot trefoil in Valleyview, Alberta
(Photo by the author, 2007)

Totally discouraged and my feeling the effects of 36 hours without a shower, we finally found a secluded, too-expensive, smelly motel on the west end of town. We checked in. I got cleaned up and had my first shave in five days. When I emerged from the bathroom, Beau was sniffing the rug, moving from one urine stain to the next on the tattered carpet. Then he started scratching his belly. The whole floor was a matt of stale dog urine. And fleas.

It was dark now but we packed up anyway and strode out the front door with barely a nod to the teenage, orange-haired receptionist at the desk who was arguing with an older and apparently familiar man. Driving back to the east end of town, we left the jeep half-hidden behind the now-vacant welcome center. Climbed the cedar fence into the trefoil pasture, I curled up beside Beau on our only blanket. The smell of the legume was euphoric.

Though I remember nothing of my sleep that night, I imagined myself dreaming of my childhood farm back in Ontario. For those few hours lying next to my dog on a thick mat of the yellow clover, I was completely sated.

Day Seven (British Columbia)

I woke to the sound of a diesel engine idling on the road in front of the visitor center. Though it was just 4:30, the early inky blackness of the night was already being nudged aside by the dawn. Feeling me move, Beau sat upright then disappeared into some knee-high clover to pee. I followed, while peering to see if the man in the truck seemed concerned about an unfamiliar jeep parked where it shouldn't be.

Before I could fully analyze the situation in my half-asleep state, the truck took off, though the man remained on his cell phone with his head turned in our direction as he accelerated towards town.



Beau in Beaver Creek, Alberta
(Photo by the author, 2007)



Dawson City, British Columbia, Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway
(Photo by the author, 2007)

Beau and I jumped in the jeep and hastily departed Valleyview. We didn't stop until we reached Grande Prairie, 130 km away. An hour later, we had breakfast in Beaver Lodge, home to the world's largest beaver. We crossed the border just before noon. "British Columbia: The Best Place on Earth," the sign read.

A short time later, we sat outside a coffee shop in Dawson Creek. It is the eastern terminus of the ALCAN (Alaska-Canada Highway), more commonly known as the Alaska Highway. It was a special moment being at the entrance to the near north, over 2,700 miles into our journey.

¹Smith, Donald F. Traveling with Beau: My 34-day Trip to a Deeper Understanding of One Health. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 9, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. Returning to my Canadian Roots: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 11, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. From Ontario to Wisconsin: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 16, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. A Lesson in Humility: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 17, 2014.

Smith, Donald F. The Canadian Prairie: Traveling with Beau. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, October 21, 2014.

KEYWORDS:

Human-animal bond

One Health

Traveling with a dog

TOPICS:

One Health

LEADING QUESTION:

What is the eastern terminus of the Alaskan Highway?

META-SUMMARY:

The author continues his journey across America with his dog.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National

Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.
